

McKINSTRY, JUSTUS

DRAWER 98

GENERALS (UNION)

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Civil War Officers Union

Justus McKinstry

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

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HERO OF THREE WARS.

GENERAL McKINSTRY'S REMARKABLE RECORD IN THE ARMY.

His Services in the Fight With Mexico—Received the Surrender of Filibuster Walker—An Interview With Lincoln.

1894. 2-25

General Justus McKinstry, whose tall form is familiar to many downtown people, has during the past year, in view of the uncertainty of human life, dictated at the request of a friend, some of the incidents connected with his long military career. These embrace personal recollections and events of the Florida, Mexican, and the early portion of the Civil War, told with a freshness and truthfulness of detail that throws much new light on the events described, and which in due time will probably be given to the public to illustrate some points not accurately known or slurred over in our national history.

General McKinstry graduated at West Point. Among his classmates were Beauregard and Bragg. Returning from the Florida War in 1842, where he received honorable mention for gallant conduct under Taylor and Worth, he was offered command by the New York authorities of the forces raised to put down the anti-rent troubles, but on being refused leave of absence for that purpose he merely acted as military adviser on a purely State matter. In the invasion of Mexico he, with McClellan, R. E. Lee, Beauregard and Joseph E. Johnston, were on the general staff of the army, and he served on the special staff of General Scott, by whom he is mentioned with distinction in the reports of the Commander-in-Chief.

After the battle of Cerro Gordo McKinstry conveyed to General Scott the captured traveling carriage of Santa Anna, drawn by four black mules, together with 70,000 Mexican dollars, the three wooden legs and other personal effects of the absconding President of Mexico. On that battlefield McKinstry also found General James Shields lying prone on his back, shot through the body with a grape shot, and reported him dead, as he at first supposed.

At Cherubusco he also, with his escort, found General Franklin Pierce, for whom he was conveying an order from General Scott, lying also prone on his back, apparently dead. He was in an unconscious condition occasioned by a fall from his horse while leaping a ditch; the animal tumbling upon him, redoubled the agony from a previous wound from which the General had not yet recovered. McKinstry ordered an attendant to bring a hat full of water from the ditch, with which the General, on partaking, regained consciousness, from a fainting spell. This is all there was of it, but the episode was unjustly used against the General and did service as a campaign lie, when he was running for President.

At Pueblo, when the army was massed in four grand divisions for a movement on the capital, it was discovered that some 200 citizens, mostly Texans, had got a foothold, in violation of positive orders against civilians accompanying the army. The General-in-Chief was furiously angry and threatened punishment. It was then that McKinstry suggested to Scott that as the army was numerically weak, it would be better, instead of sending these men back to the coast, they being well mounted and armed, to form them into a battalion and add them to our forces.

This was done and a general order issued announcing them as the McKinstry Volunteers, under the command of Captain McKinstry. They led the advance, behaved well, and after the capture of the city, in Scott's order mustering them out of service, he attested their gallant conduct in every battle fought in the valley.

After the capitulation of the City of Mexico Captain McKinstry, as Quartermaster, had charge of billeting officers and running of the inhabitants of the city. He

employed 10,000 Mexican women in making underclothing for the troops, and in the distribution of these and other supplies he was assisted by Lieutenant D. M. Frost, Regimental Quartermaster of the Rifles, and by Lieutenant Ulysses S. Grant, Regimental Quartermaster of the Fourth Infantry.

When the Mexican War closed General McKinstry went out to the California Coast with Governor Weller of Ohio to run the boundary line between the United States and Mexico, according to the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Here, as the principal military officer, McKinstry accepted the surrender to him of Filibuster Walker on Mexican territory.

The gold excitement broke up the commission. He remained in California six years, a witness of the intense excitement caused by vigilance committees, duelling, gold digging and constitution making.

Returning to the States, he was prevented by Jefferson Davis, then Secretary of War, whom he suspected of sympathizing with the Filibusters, from going back to California, and was assigned to Tampa Bay, Fla., where he remained four years, taking part in the Seminole War. In the fall of 1859 he was ordered to St. Louis as Chief Quartermaster of the Western Department. The reports widely circulated and believed at the time, that arms were being transmitted to the Southern States through the Quartermaster's Department, was the occasion of the subjoined interview with the President elect:

"After the election of Lincoln to the Presidency in 1860," said General McKinstry, "a rumor extensively spread among Republicans which excited a great deal of fear. It was believed that Floyd, Secretary of War, had been sending a large quantity of arms to the Southern States. Mr. Lincoln learned that if it was the case of course these arms had been forwarded through me as the Chief Quartermaster of the Western Department. He thereupon sent for me to come and see him at Springfield. I arrived there about 8 o'clock in the evening, in company with one of his committee, and immediately proceeded to the Capitol, the Governor's room being then used as a reception-room by Mr. Lincoln. After an introduction and a cordial reception, I exhibited to him abstracts from my books, showing all the arms and munitions of war forwarded by my department, and showed him that the different Southern States had only received their annual quotas under the law. After this statement, which seemed satisfactory to Mr. Lincoln, he entered into a conversation that lasted till 12 o'clock, or midnight. In this conversation I frankly told him that I, as an officer of the army, had never exercised my right of elective franchise; that I was a Democrat by birth and education, but that the salvation of my country was uppermost in my thoughts and mind. I told him that I had recently come from the Southern country, where I had long been stationed, and that I believed I knew the feeling of the Southern people well and that their leaders had resolved on war rather than submit to the Presidency of Mr. Lincoln, and that they would resort to any and all measures to carry out their ends. I added, further, that I honestly believed they would attempt to assassinate him before his inauguration, and I therefore advised him to be constantly on his guard, particularly in passing through Baltimore. His conversation with me indicated his fond belief that there would be no rebellion or rising of the Southern States. I was so impressed with his apparent lack of knowledge of events as they really existed, that I told him there would be a most serious war, in my judgment, of seven years' duration, costing thousands of lives and millions of treasure, but that in the end the North would triumph and slavery be forever blotted out. I came away with an impression that Mr. Lincoln never led; he simply followed. I returned to St. Louis that night and never afterwards saw Mr. Lincoln alive."

